United Nations

Daily Highlights

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Security Council, in Presidential statement, expresses concern over tragic incident in which Belgian member of European Community Monitoring Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina is killed; requests "full explanation" and assurance from local authorities that such incidents are not repeated.

+ Addressing 106th annual convention of American Newspaper Publishers Association, Secretary-General says the press has "crucial role to play in promoting the spread of democracy"; German Chancellor Helmut Kohl calls for economic assistance to eastern Europe.

+ Secretary-General reports that delays in deployment of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia could have "negative effect on operation"; suggests re-examination of United Nations financial and administrative rules applied to such operations.

+ Secretary-General's Personal Representative, Benon Sevan, meets with Minister of Defence in Mujahedeed Interim Council of Afghanistan for discussion of security situation, as well as humanitarian and economic assistance; reports continued fighting in Kabul.

+ United Nations ship "Felix", loaded with 5000 tonnes of food for hundreds of thousands of Somalis, arrives safely in port of Mogadishu.

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The President of the Security Council, Peter Hohenfellner (Austria), today expressed "deep concern" on behalf of Council members about the "tragic incident" which, a few days ago, cost the life of a Belgian national of the European Community Monitoring Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In a statement read out this afternoon, Council members extended their sincere condolences to his relatives and paid tribute to all members of the European Community Monitor Missions who carry out their difficult tasks. While awaiting the result of an inquiry and the punishment of those responsible, they reiterated their demand that the safety of the European Community monitors and the United Nations personnel be ensured.

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Mr. Hohenfellner said he had requested that Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Vladimir Petrovsky ask Under-Secretary-General for Peace-keeping Operations, Marrack Goulding, who is in the area, to make sure in this contacts with the authorities on the ground that "such tragic incidents not be repeated", and that the authorities provide, as soon as possible, a "full explanation" for this incident. The President said Mr. Petrovsky had already acted accordingly.

Meanwhile, according to a United Nations spokeswoman today, Mr. Goulding, accompanied by Commander of United Nations Protection Force in Yugoslavia, Satish Nambiar, were en route to Sarajevo, following a shooting incident around Pale, a small town 30 kilometers east of Sarajevo, which had delayed their arrival. The Under-Secretary-General is examining the feasibility of dispatching a United Nations peace-keeping operation to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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Addressing the 106th annual convention of the American Newspaper Publishers Association today, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said the press had a crucial role to play in promoting the spread of democracy. It could give a voice to the ideas and opinions of a broad cross-section of society, he said, and furthermore, by encouraging greater participation in the decision-making process, it could contribute to the democratization of international relations.

The Secretary-General further said the United Nations and its more affluent member States had the responsibility to support the efforts of those who are trying to establish and maintain a free and independent press where it had long been absent.

Referring to the "unpleasant reality" of the Orgnization's current financial situation, the Secretary-General thanked the press for its editorial support of what he called "the important principle" of paying assessed contributions in full and on time. He also asserted that a well-informed public was "essential if we, at the United Nations, are to succeed" in achieving the ideals set out in the United Nations Charter.

In his statement to the Convention, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl praised the current potential of the United Nations, saying "the need for the Organization is greater now than it has been since it was founded in 1945".

The German Chancellor also used the occassion to urge the United States and Japan to aid eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, noting "there was no sensible alternative". According to Mr. Kohl, Germany had reached the limit of its capacity to help the newly emerging democracies, having provided $45 billion to the former Soviet Union and $64 billion to eastern, central and southeastern European nations.

Earlier today, Mr. Kohl also met with environmental leaders at Headquarters, who are participating in the negotiations on a Climate Change Convention in advance of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June.

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United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) had begun to establish itself both politically and militarily, and work on all aspects of the mission's activities was proceeding at varying rates, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. However, he said, the Force had faced "difficulties and delays in deployment" which, if not remedied, could have a negative effect on the operation. Mr. Boutros-Ghali made this assessment in the first progress report on the United Nations operation in Cambodia to the Security Council, dated 1 May.

The Secretary-General went on to say that the slow pace of the recruitment and deployment of civilian staff "could impair UNTAC's ability to exercise adequate supervision and control where required"; and the slower pace of arrival of military contingents "could also have an adverse impact on UNTAC's ability to maintain its tight schedule of operations". Every effort was being made to address the difficulties mentioned in the present report, he said, and to discharge UNTAC's complex tasks within the time-frames envisaged in the implementation plan. He noted that the experience of mounting a large and complex United Nations operation such as UNTAC might point to the possible need to re-examine the existing financial and administrative rules and regulations applied to such operations.
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The Secretary-General's Personal Representative in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Benon Sevan, met today with Minister of Defence in the Mujahedeen Interim Council of Afghanistan for a discussion of the security situation as well as the humanitarian and economic assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

A United Nations spokesman told correspondents today that Mr. Sevan had reported from Kabul that heavy artillery and rocket fire had continued today "with increased intensity". This morning, the office of the World Food Programme (WFP) was considerably damaged when hit by an artillery shell. There were no casualties. Because of the dangerous situation prevailing in the area, the spokesman said, further reductions would be made in numbers of international United Nations staff in Kabul. As of tomorrow, 6 May, there would be 18 international staff in Islamabad and ten in Mazar-i-Sharii..If the security situation permitted, the United Nations planned to fly several tons of medical supplies to Kabul in the next few days, the spokesman said.

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In Somalia, the safe arrival of the "Felix", a ship containing United Nations relief supplies, marks the first time since the start of major hostilities late in 1991 that food destined for hundreds of thousands of Somalis affected by the conflict in Mogadishu has been allowed to be shipped to that city. It also establishes the principle of humanitarian assistance to

all civilians, as one now accepted by the major factions and smaller groups in Mogadishu. The United Nations plans to land a ship laden with food every ten to 12 days.

In a statement issued on Sunday, 3 May, the United Nations Special Coordinator for Humanitarian Assistance in Somalia, David Bassiouni, thanked the two Somali parties -- Interim President Ali Mahdi Mohamed and General Aidid -- and other groups in greater Mogadishu, for their assistance in bringing about the opening of the port of Mogadishu, and for keeping their promise of safe passage for food, as well as for national and international relief workers.

The last ship to attempt a landing at port Mogadishu, the Marco Polo, was shelled while still off-shore on 5 March, and forced to return to its port of origin, Mombasa, in Kenya.

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